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## The Different Roles of Parents and Friends

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*The Different Roles of Parents and Friends: Support for divorce and repartnering following marital dissolution among Latina and White women*

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***The Different Roles of Parents and Friends: Support for divorce and repartnering following marital dissolution among Latina and White women***

**Abstract**

What role do significant others play in orientations to repartnering following divorce? Situated within critical role theory, and focusing on 23 White and Latina divorcees from Texas (US), this paper examines orientations towards repartnering in the light of distinct friend and parent expectations. While friends were sources of sympathy and affirmation, parents were more interventionist, indicating moral expectations. Parents either encouraged repartnering as the route to a happy future, or discouraged it on grounds that first marriage creates sacred, unbreakable bonds. The former response was more common among Whites, and the latter more common among Latinas. The paper argues that the expectations of friends and parents are taken account of during this transitional period, in positive and negative ways, as orientations towards marriage, divorce and re-partnering were explained and justified.

**KEYWORDS:** family, divorce, remarriage, social roles, intergenerational relationships, parenthood, friendship, latino/a sociology

*The Different Roles of Parents and Friends: Support for divorce and repartnering following marital dissolution among Latina and White women*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The United States has among the highest divorce and remarriage rates in the world (Stevenson and Wolfers 2007), with around half of marriages ending in divorce (Cherlin 2010) and almost a quarter of current marriages being remarriages (Livingston 2014). Although remarriage is relatively common in the US, what is known about the motivations or barriers to remarriage remains primarily limited to individual characteristics. Few studies have considered the influence of friends or family members on orientations towards remarriage following divorce. Some perspectives on modern families suggest that individuals are less bound by family connections as marriage and family are deinstitutionalized and individualized (e.g. Weeks 2007; Weston 1991). Others have suggested that marriage and family relations has been reconfigured rather than deinstitutionalized, to accommodate diverse family forms (Smyth 2017). Moreover, longer overlaps in lifespans between parents and children have arguably intensified connections between adult children and their parents (e.g. Antonucci et al. 2011; Umberson 1992). To speak to this wider debate, this paper seeks to explore the distinction between friendship and parenthood in the context of expectations of support for divorce and repartnering following marital dissolution and how this can shape divorced women's orientations toward remarriage.

In considering this question, the paper takes into account race and ethnic differences. Although race-ethnic differences in marital rates are well known (Bramlett and Mosher 2002; McNamee and Raley 2011; Raley and Bumpass 2003), the reasons behind these differences are less clear, especially for remarriage (Raley and Sweeney 2009; Sweeney 2010). A surprising pattern is remarriage differences between Latinos and Whites. While these populations marry and divorce at similar rates, Latinos remarry less than Whites (McNamee and Raley 2011). The reasons for these differences remain largely unexplained. Most previous research on who remarries has focused on individual characteristics and perspectives, rather than interactions with significant others, notably friends and parents.

While the concept of social roles has fallen out of favor for sociology, it does offer a valuable way of conceiving the mutual expectations and claims we make on each other through social institutions, such as families and friendships (Joas and Knöbl 2009). The perspective informing this paper understands roles and social institutions as dynamic and complex clusters of normative expectations, rather than scripted, inflexible, and overbearing. It is through these normative expectations that social institutions, such as friendship, marriage, and parenthood, take shape and change, as we struggle to interpret and meet role expectations, and so justify our actions (Honneth 1995). Framed by critical role theory and focusing on in-depth interviews with recently divorced women in Texas, this research aims to first examine the differential expectations and experiences of support from friends and parents and second to identify variations in these interactions by ethnicity, to explore potential explanations for the White-Latino divergence in remarriage.

### *Parents, Friends, and the Experience of Divorce*

Divorce intensifies some social relationships while loosening others, instigating a reorganization of personal networks, resituating family and friends as primary interactants during the adjustment period (Kramrei et al. 2007). The intensity and dynamics of these interactions during the divorce process illustrates how these relationships have been reconfigured.

While contemporary friendship and marriage carry strong expectations of individual freedom, so that these relationships are expected to end when they are no longer mutually fulfilling, parenthood instead carries strong expectations of lifelong commitment, attentiveness, and care (Honneth 2014:132,163; Umberson 1992). Parenthood is understood to be defined by unconditional moral imperatives, in contrast with friendship, which is informed more by conditional expectations, relative to the context (Bicchieri 2017:31).

It is not surprising then that parents provide increased levels of support at the onset of their adult child's divorce, including with childcare, finance, and interpersonal contact (Sarkisian and Gerstel 2008; Suitor and Pillemer 2006 but also see Fingerma et al. 2009). Divorced daughters may elicit even more support, particularly when they are responsible for children (Willson et al. 2006).

In contrast, friendship is expected to last only so long as it fulfils expectations of mutual interest and sympathy (Honneth 2014:139). One consequence of this is that

relationships with parents are more likely to continue when conflicts arise, compared to friends or partners (Blieszner and Adams 1992). If support from particular friends is not forthcoming or if the support provided is seen to be too intrusive or meddling, then the friendship may be strained or even dissolved. While support from parents might also be regarded as overly intrusive, it is much more improbable that these relationships will be dissolved. Friendships are less fraught, since they can be ended if disagreements or value clashes arise. Nevertheless, friends can be a positive resource, particularly in terms of emotional support during difficult times (Huddleston and Hawking 1993).

Regarding possible ethnic differences in patterns of support, many scholars have argued that family life is highly valued within Latino culture (Chilman 1993; García et al. 2000; Vega 1990) and that Latinos have reported feeling obligated to assist and respect parents more than Whites (Fuligni and Pedersen 2002; Phinney et al. 2003.) Since Latinos are predominately Catholic, some research has also considered the impact of religious affiliation as a part of the cultural emphasis on traditional attitudes regarding marriage and the family (Cauce et al. 2002; Oropesa 1996; Stogrand et al. 2009). Previous research has also found that compared to Whites, Latinos perceive more support from family and less from friends (Almeida et al. 2009).

### *Repartnering and Remarriage*

The few studies that have investigated the influence of social relationships on repartnering and remarriage have focused on the effects of interactions with ex-spouses or adult children (e.g. McNamee, Amato, and King 2014; de Jong Gierveld and Merz 2013). Indirect evidence suggests that friends and parents do matter in

shaping orientations towards marriage. For instance, the approval of friends predicts greater stability for partnerships beyond adolescence (e.g. Felmlee 2001).

Furthermore, childbearing and divorce can spread within friend networks (McDermott et al. 2013; Balbo and Barban 2014); while parental preferences influence adult children's behavior in cohabitation and timing of first birth, even when attitudes are not shared across the generations (Barber 2000; Axinn and Thornton 1993).

Marital status varies widely across race-ethnicity, although the mechanisms behind these differences are not well understood. Whites have higher rates of marriage and lower rates of divorce than Blacks but similar rates to Latinos (Bramlett and Mosher 2002; Kreider and Ellis 2011). One of the most widely accepted explanations for the difference in marital patterns between Blacks and Whites is socioeconomic inequality (see Raley and Sweeney 2009; White and Rogers 2000; Wilson 1987). However, Latinos and Whites display similar first marriage and divorce rates, despite Latinos having socioeconomic positions closer to Blacks (Aud et al. 2010; DeNavas-Walt et al. 2011). One of the most popular explanations for this paradox posits that a pronuptial cultural orientation offsets the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage on marital outcomes (see Oropesa 1996). Yet, Latinos remarry at rates significantly lower than Whites, though still higher than Blacks (McNamee and Raley 2011; Bumpass et al. 1990; Bramlett and Mosher 2002). Despite the intriguing divergence in White-Latino marriage patterns, no prior study has been able to identify an explanation for the ethnic differences in remarriage.

While research on marriage suggests that friends and family can influence attitudes to future relationships and family formation, as well as play meaningful roles in



postdivorce adjustment, little is known about this process with respect to repartnering. Moreover, the influence of friends and family has not been fully explored as a possible explanation for the divergence in White-Latino remarriage patterns. This study sheds new light on how recently divorced Latina and White women perceive and experience distinct reactions from friends and parents to divorce and repartnering following marital dissolution.

## METHODS

This paper draws on 23 in-depth semi-structured interviews with recently divorced women, sampled from Travis County, Texas divorce records. White and Latino women, aged between 18 and 41 around the time of their first divorce, were selected for interview. The study focused on women since they generally have more perceived social support (Zimet et al. 1988), and consequently can be assumed to have more intense involvement with significant others in the context and aftermath of divorce. Younger women were selected given that they are more likely to remarry than older women (McNamee and Raley 2011). The focus on a first marriage was designed to capture the most typical group to consider remarriage. White and Latino divorcees were included to capture some degree of ethnic difference in postdivorce experiences without overly diluting what is a small sample.

Interviews were held approximately one to three months before or after the date their divorce was granted. Texas law requires sixty days between filing a divorce petition and decreeing a divorce, and an additional thirty days before the remarriage is permitted (Texas Family Code: 6.702 and 6.801). Interviews were timed to recruit women with recent or ongoing involvement in this process to focus on sharply felt interactions and

experiences, which have not yet been dulled by the passage of time. All women had at least filed a petition for divorce with a few having recently been granted the divorce. None had remarried while the majority (17) had started dating or formed new relationships, which is typical for this divorce period. This captures women at similar stages in their divorce and repartnering process as they would likely be considering or starting new relationships but would not have already entered into a remarriage.

Drawing on the recruitment process developed by Anderson and Greene (2011), women were contacted by letter, email, and phone, when the information was available on a divorce petition or divorce decree in 2011. Letters were mailed with two dollars enclosed, and emails were also sent, which briefly outlined the study. The money was included to encourage recipients to read the letter and foster trust in the validity of the study. Small financial tokens in recruitment letters have been found to improve response rates far more than promises of larger sums alone (Dillman 2011). A follow-up phone call was made, unless the women initiated contact first. Eligibility was determined in a phone interview, which included the following criteria: no plans to reconcile; no prior marriage dissolutions; living within the selected city limits; 40 years of age<sup>i</sup> or younger; and identified as either White or Latina. The divorce documents pre-established gender and that the divorces were to different-sex unions.

The final sample included 12 Latinas and 11 White women between the ages of 18-41 experiencing their first divorce.<sup>ii</sup> There were 15 mothers and 8 women identifying as practicing Catholic, Protestant, or nondenominational Christian.<sup>iii</sup> Among the Latina women, who were predominately of Mexican origin reflecting the demographic composition of the sample city, four are first generation, three are second generation,

and the remaining five are third generation or higher. Due to the limited composition of the sample, we are unable to compare nativity status or country of origin. These characteristics can be important in marriage and family formation and should be considered in future research.

## RESULTS

### *The Difference between Parents and Friends*

What follows considers the variety of ways in which women interviewed for this study perceived and expected their friends and parents to react to the divorce transition and the possibility or actuality of entering new relationships. This involved attending to the distinction between unconditional expectations concerning how to live a good life on the one hand (moral norms), and more conditional, situated and negotiable social norms on the other (Bicchieri 2017:31).

Following an assessment of how friends reacted to the respondents' divorce, the analysis turns to a discussion of parental responses. The differences in responses between friends and parents, and how that is embedded in the expectations for each type of relationship, are the focus of attention. Expectations of parental support or disapproval of divorce and repartnering are considered in turn, as they inform respondent orientations to repartnering. How these may vary by ethnicity is also examined, with a view to explaining divergent White-Latino patterns of remarriage.

### *Sympathetic Friends*

Friends were described as taking an uncritical approach to divorce and the possibility of remarriage. Friends tended to affirm rather than to influence or direct the actions of

respondents. This is unsurprising, given the distinct character of this social role. Friendships are regarded as “true” or ‘real” only for as long as they are mutually supportive and rewarding and are expected to sometimes come to a natural end, as interests and commitments shift over time (Honneth 2014:139-40). Notably, no ethnic differences were detected in the responses of friends towards the divorce or repartnership.

Respondents discussed the generally uncritical, sympathetic support they received from friends as they went through divorce and its aftermath. Thea (31, no children, White), recalled discussing her indecision about getting divorced with her friends who “have basically taken on the role of listening...and being supportive of what my final decision is.” She remarks that “mostly they’re just listening and trying to help me figure it out on my own, what to do, basically.” New friends from a church that Hortenica (32, mother, Latina), had recently been going to were similarly nonjudgmental: “They said everything is gonna be okay. They say that if you’re not happy, why [would] you stay together?”

Friends’ reactions to the divorce, as perceived by the respondents, were almost exclusively nonjudgmental, centering on providing affirmation and a sympathetic ear. Active interventions and directive advice were not common. While some seemed to offer concrete advice, for example “they’re [...] telling me to take it [dating] kind of slow” (Gabriela, 28, mother, Latina), this was often not intended to steer the respondent towards one or other course of action, but only to sound a cautionary note. However, this was not always appreciated. One respondent felt somewhat betrayed by what she perceived as her friends’ failure to warn her about her ex-husband’s flawed character:

After [ex] and I split up it was like “if you saw this then why didn’t you tell me?” They were like, “I didn’t know how to tell you.” They’ve made that promise that next time they’ll tell me, so I trust they will. *Lacy (26, mother, White)*

The distinctive sympathetic role played by friends was clear. Asked whether her friends wanted her to remarry, Rebecca’s (30, no children, White) response was typical:

... mostly they just want me to be happy, and if that’s being remarried then be remarried, but if that’s being single then be single. But I want to be remarried, so they naturally think of me being remarried is me being happy.

In addition to support, divorcees frequently mentioned friends offering to set them up on dates. For example, Nicole (30, no children, White) remarked how “(i)t seemed like my friend and his girlfriend really made it a mission to find a good man for me.” When she found herself interested in one of their friends, she wanted to see if they thought he was a good match. She continued, “just their seal of approval is what made me give him a chance and trust him more.” It seems that the validating influence of friends on first marriages (Lewis 1973) can also be applied to postdivorce relationships.

Experiences of marriage and divorce were recalled as having taken place in a context where friends were often undergoing the same transitions (McDermott et al. 2013). For

example, Lauren (34, mother, White), commented that she had gotten married originally because “all of our friends were getting married, and it just sounded like the next thing to do”. Similarly, the end of marriages did not occur in a social vacuum. Lacy (26, mother, White), remembered

the night that [my husband] and I split up, our friends that lived two floors below us split up; the couple that lived right below us split up the night before; and then a few days after we split up, our really good friends in Houston split up. That was the weekend that everybody broke up.

Discussing the close alliance she shared with three other women in similar circumstances, Christina (41, mother, Latina) commented that: “we would get together all the time. We were each other’s husbands. We helped each other out with the kids, with food, with money, whatever.” Clearly, such close relationships were made possible by shared experiences and norms, particularly those concerning marriage, divorce, and repartnering, indicating the significance of friends as reference groups which could validate respondents’ decisions following the ending of a marriage (Goffman 1971:87).

Divorce can lead to changes in friend networks, as already mentioned, as those who were connected to the former spouse are lost (Terhell et al. 2004). Unsurprisingly, the dissolution of those mutual relationships which had involved the ex-partner was the most difficult aspect of friendship in the face of marriage breakdown. As Rebecca (30, no children, White), put it, “[i]t’s like a little custody battle”, as old friends took sides

with one or the other of the separated spouses. Sometimes, these custody battles appeared to reflect high levels of mistrust and resentment:

Who knows what he's [ex-husband] told them [mutual friends]. I don't deserve to be hated through all of this. I did what I needed to do. They've unfriended me on Facebook. They won't talk to me. I've gotten some mean text messages. But it is what it is. *Rebecca (30, no children, White)*

Some inevitably responded to the loss of old friends by adapting their preferences. Thea (31, no children, White) who had "lost a lot of mutual friends - they don't talk to me anymore" stated she was "kind of also going through the stage of wanting to be alone. There's so many different stages and so many different feelings, and right now I just want to be left alone." Turning away from specific friends was always possible and was unlikely to incur wider reputational damage if this could be justified by their failure to measure up to the standard of the "true" friend, who stands by in times of crisis. As Liz (37, no children, White) explained "You go through something like this and you really find out who your friends are, or you really find out who understands you... (Y)our closest friends, the people you think will show up for you are rarely the ones that do; it's those random friends that kind of drifted away that suddenly come back."

This shift in prioritization also reflects the fluidity of friendship, relative to expectations of parents. New friends could be cultivated whose ability to sympathize with the newly divorced was not compromised by a connection to the ex-spouse: "Friends come and go; they've chosen sides. I've lost friends through it, but then again, I've found a lot

of friends” (Rebecca, 30, no children, White). Several of the women spoke about developing new friends after relocating due to the marriage dissolution, which also placed mutual friends at a distance. This ability to reinvent reference groups in the wake of divorce, in ways that would allow for continued affirmation of actions and decisions, was specific to friendships, allowing respondents to cope with the impact of divorce on their self-conception.

The sympathetic nature of friendship was reflected in the uncritical and affirmational approaches toward divorce and repartnering, which both Latina and White women experienced. These responses could be tied to general expectations that this role thrives on, namely mutual values, shared experiences, and sympathy, but can also end if these conditions are not being met.

### *The Moral Quality of the Parent Role*

Parents were generally expected to play a more directly interventionist role in the postdivorce lives of respondents. The permanent quality of parenthood, and the expectation that parents will cultivate the independence and moral character of their children, makes it very different from friendship (Honneth 2014:166). Parents consequently feel implicated in their children’s moral decisions and feel a duty to guide or even direct those decisions, particularly during major periods of transition in adulthood.

In contrast to friends, White-Latina differences were evident in comments on parental expectations. White and Latino parents were both actively involved in their divorced daughter’s lives; however, the moral compass shaping what parents believed to be in



their daughters' best interests was ethnically framed. White parents tended to affirm an individualistic view of marriage that would associate relationship fulfilment with personal success. Consequently, they tended to encourage the formation of new attachments. Latino parents instead tended to emphasize caution before forming new relationships. Latinos have a strong cultural orientation toward familialism (e.g. Zinn 1982) which, although not synonymous with pronuptial attitudes, nevertheless may explain reluctance amongst Latina parents to support divorce and remarriage. These differences did not vary by reasons for the divorce, the presence of children in the household, or their parents' marital status.

The significance of parents, both in their interactions with their divorced daughters and in their more general attitudes to marriage and divorce, was clear in the reflections of respondents. While it was not the case that respondents simply obeyed their parents' instructions, their expected reactions informed their attitudes to post-divorce relationships, in positive and negative ways.

While parental disapproval of divorce can strain familial relationships (Pahl and Pevalin 2005), many respondents had the opposite experience. For instance, Thea (31, no children, White), explained her father's attitude:

My father is very black and white, you know, he's very "He cheated on you, how can you ever trust him again? Get a divorce and move on. Stop thinking about him and move on." [...] My dad is a doctor and he's always tried to hook me up with several people he works with. So I went up to see my parents in Wisconsin, and I walk through the airport to the car and he's like "Here's

Mark's phone number. You're going to give him a call and go to lunch. You can have my car and you can drop me off right now." They very much want me to meet someone else and move on. They are doing whatever it takes to support me financially, set me up on dates, and push me forward.

Others strongly advocated the resumption of dating as a potential source of excitement or fun. Heather (20, no children, White), said her mother was encouraging her to 'speed date', amongst other things: "[s]he knows that when I start dating, [...] I won't be so much of a homebody hermit."

Rebecca's (30, no children, White) parents similarly urged her to start dating by communicating their own excitement about it: "[t]hey don't want me sitting alone on the couch. They want me to be happy. They're excited for me." She recalled an incident when, faced with the prospect of arranging a date while in the company of her parents, she panicked and they tried to help:

I just froze and forgot my name all of a sudden. She [Mom] is like "go give him your number or something", and I'm like, "No, you go do it." I'm 30 years old, come on, I can do this, what's the worst he's gonna say, "No?" My parents even got involved, like my mom went up and started asking him something about the car. I was just standing there. I couldn't find anything to say.

Parents who encouraged their daughters to return to dating following divorce cannot be interpreted as blurring the boundaries between parents and friends. Instead, this attitude,

which was more prevalent among the parents of divorced White women compared to Latino women, captured a moral preference for a return to married life, albeit with a new partner.

Those who supported their daughter's decision to divorce and begin dating again did so in quite interventionist and sometimes unexpected ways. For example, Vanessa (23, no children, Latina), recalled the support she received from her parents when she began dating after her marriage had failed:

So I told my mom and she was like "You need to get a divorce." And I would be like "I'm trying." And finally, I told my dad, and they took it pretty well. They gave me advice that I needed to get a divorce and take care of that, but they didn't react the way that I thought they would.

These types of support interventions were often aimed at parents helping their daughters get untangled from the relationship for them to move on. Jennifer (37, mother, Latina) "had to get the heck out [of her marital home] because I just could not live here. My dad ended up buying the house from me to get me out of the mortgage, to help me out."

Lacy (26, mother, White), recalled similar interventions from her parents, following an episode of domestic violence:

I called my mom the night we had our huge fight and she was terrified for me, because it was like a physically violent fight. And then she said, "I'm sending

you money so you can get a car seat for you and your baby and you can get out of there.” She was scared.

A parental approach to marriage as a duty-bound relationship was common amongst respondents. This perspective reflected a more conservative, religiously derived view that prioritized keeping the first marriage intact, fostering a strong expectation that marriage creates unbreakable relations of obligation and reciprocity, even in the face of divorce. This type of parental response was distinctly more common among Latina divorcees compared to White divorcees.

[My parents] think you should only get married once, and if you do get separated it can only be for certain reasons, and you should always try to make your marriage work, because it’s so sacred to them. I know it was hard for [my mother] because she would tell me “You need to work your marriage out. There’s always gonna be problems in any marriage. There’s two different people, so there’s gonna be conflict, but you have to be strong and try to make things work.” So she did push that a little bit. After I talked to her she knew I was happier -- that I made my decision, you know. But it was definitely harder for her because of the religion thing. *Vanessa (23, no children, Latina)*

Some parents seemed to find their daughter’s divorce personally devastating, perhaps feeling that they had failed to cultivate her moral character, defined in religious terms.

For instance, Sarah (37, no children, White) explained her mother's reaction in this way:

For the first couple of weeks, I hesitated to call my mother. I mean I told her about it but I never wanted to really call her, because all she would do is cry and it made me feel bad because I didn't want to hear her cry; I wanted her to let me cry and listen to what I had to say. But instead, she kept making it how devastating it was for her. I don't think she really meant it that way. I think she meant that she was really hurting for me but it aggravated me.

Parental disappointment in the dissolution of a marriage could influence the adult children to draw out the divorce process. For example, Luz (22, mother, Latina), decided to divorce after several attempts to save the marriage, including through counseling, in response to her parents' interventions. "(T)hey would convince me to try, and I would go back, and it was the same thing over and over again." Luz attributed her parents' disapproval and encouragement to stay in the marriage to their values: "My dad and mom didn't really like it; they're old fashioned and have been together for 30 years.... You're supposed to get married one time, stick by it, work it out, do whatever you can to fix it."

A conservative moral framework that highlighted the sanctity of marriage was sometimes explicitly supplemented with the principle that dating while still officially married, even if actually separated, is wrong: "My mom knew [that I had started dating] and she didn't like it. It was very 'You're not right. You shouldn't be doing this. You're not divorced'" (Ana, 22, mother, Latina). Similarly, Corinne (29, mother, White),

recalled that her mother's main objection "wasn't so much that I was going out with somebody, [it] was that I was still married." These responses could reflect parental hopes for reconciliation. For instance, when Ana (22, mother, Latina), started dating before her divorce was finalized, her parents' response focused on the possibility of reconciliation:

I think since the divorce wasn't finalized, my parents put a lot of pressure on "this is not right." I think they look at it as "you can still go back to him." They still took it as "it's not finalized then you're not over with it", but to me it was. They put a lot of pressure like "You're not doing the right thing. Why are you doing that? Why are you going out?"

A conservative view of marriage contained expectations of traditional gendered roles, as Clarissa's (28, no children, Latina) experience demonstrated:

My mom was very calm and understanding about [my divorce], [as] my dad was at first. And then things got really bad between me and my family when my ex-husband wanted to move in with my parents because he didn't have money and he could not afford his own place. My dad actually offered for him to stay with them -- I didn't want that. [...] my dad started blaming me for the divorce. He was saying it was my fault because I wasn't taking care of him the way a wife should. He's very old fashioned. And that also caused fights between my mom and him, "How can you not be on your daughter's side? She didn't do anything, he wanted the divorce." [...] I said, "Why is he still there with you

guys?” And he [Dad] said, “He’s family and I don’t want him to just live out in the streets.” I’m like, “He chose to leave this family.” It was just a big problem.

Her father’s actions were driven by the strong moral belief that marriage bonds should not be dissolved. Clarissa’s parents discouraged her from dating after the divorce, with her father making it clear that “he didn’t want me bringing random guys home. He made me feel like I did that all the time or something, made me feel bad about myself.” At the time of the interview, Clarissa had a boyfriend that her parents refused to meet and she contemplated ending the relationship.

This was a strong response to a daughter’s divorce, where the husband left but the wife was nevertheless treated as blameworthy, reflecting an understanding of marriage as deeply gendered and duty-laden. This perception of parental responsibility and gendered marriage was not isolated. For example, Leonor (30, mother, Latina) expected her parents to take a similar approach to her divorce, viewing marriage as a strongly gendered relationship characterized by female duty and self-sacrifice. Reflecting on their reactions to her divorce, she explained:

I was more concerned about when I started dating again, because it’s a cultural thing where they [parents] don’t think it’s appropriate. We have to keep ourselves for our husbands. “Now you don’t make it work and now you’re going to be dating someone. Who are you? What kind of person are you?” So it’s kind of like that. So I was more concerned about that.

The divorcees did not necessary follow their parents' wishes to start or wait to start new relationships. However, the parents' disapproval appeared to have other consequences that could relate to delaying serious relationships. Divorcees that predicted disapproval would hide their relationships out of a fear of moral judgment. For example, Vanessa (23, no children, Latina) kept her new boyfriend secret from her father: "I felt kind of like if I told him that I'm dating this guy he would be like "What do you mean, you just got out of a marriage?" I guess I was scared that they would judge me or something."

Ana (22, mother, Latina) who still had not told her friends she was dating worried "that it's going to be the same [criticisms as] with my family." In explaining how this has affected developing her relationships, she describes the strain of hiding her current boyfriend when they are out: "I think when I get to the point where I don't feel like I have to hide it from anybody, that's when it will be serious." Later on she says "...it's gonna be a lot of negative criticism, and that's gonna just make you doubt yourself. So I think that's one of the things that's gonna be really hard about finding someone."

Respondents perceived that parental attitudes to divorce and repartnering were more complex than those of friends. Gender and ethnicity generated distinct expectations in the interactions between parents and divorcees, and were taken account of in orientations towards repartnering, whether by avoiding potential confrontation through evasiveness and secrecy, losing faith in the viability of new relationships, or cooperating with parental efforts to find new partners. The distinctiveness of ethnicity in the way the role of parent was interpreted and enacted by divorced daughters is noteworthy, particularly considering the lower remarriage rates of Latinos compared to Whites.



## CONCLUSION

In the life transition following divorce, friends and family are important sources of support and guidance, although in different ways. The qualitative data examined here illustrate that these are quite distinct roles. It was not the case that the boundaries between parents and friends were blurred. Instead, respondents expected friends to provide unqualified support as they experienced divorce and its aftermath, an unsurprising role expectation given the historic association with freedom, as friends enable individuals “to experience the social realization of their own feelings in the benevolent attentiveness and reflection of others’ (Honneth, 2014:137). By contrast, parents were expected to express moral attitudes in their reactions to potential intimate relationships following a divorce.

Although no ethnic differences emerged in the supportive reactions from friends, there was a distinction in the form that parents expressed moral attitudes. For Latinas, a strong attachment to keeping the first marriage intact derived from religious and familial moral norms, which led parents to generally oppose both divorce and repartnering. The sacredness of marriage was understood to define family relationships and obligations, and so could not be dissolved. For Whites, the role of parent tended instead to be guided by a moral norm of individual freedom and self-realization, and daughters were consequently expected to seek out new intimate partnerships following the ‘failure’ of a marriage.

Previous studies that have examined White-Latino remarriage differences have been predominately limited to individual demographic characteristics and have not taken

into account the influence from significant others such as parents (McNamee and Raley 2011; Bumpass et al. 1990). The ethnic difference on whether the parents were encouraging or cautioning against repartnering has intriguing implications for this divergence. Most of these women were having relationships regardless of their parents' views, but it did appear to shape their orientations toward relationships in terms of going public, considering it serious, and the level of certainty about moving on into new relationships. This suggests that the lower rates of remarriage among Latinos compared to Whites might be explained by the influence that these diverging parental reactions have on divorced women.

Notably, both forms of parental response demonstrated concern for their daughters. While parenting roles could be guided by a variety of substantive norms, depending on the context, those roles were nevertheless important expressions of the family as a social institution. Indeed, the support provided by parents to divorced daughters in this study indicates that intergenerational ties remain strong, at least for young women, countering the thesis of "family decline" in highly individualized societies (cf. Popenoe 1993). The ways in which daughters perceived and responded to the distinct expectations of their friends and their parents in the period following divorce, as they considered the possibility of forming new partnerships, indicates the continued value of social roles as guides for action and interaction.

This study sheds light on the distinctions between friends and parents on the remarriage orientations of young divorced women, and how this varies by ethnicity. This points to several promising areas for future research. The experience of encountering sympathetic friends could have been shaped by the loss of unsupportive friends. This

was likely underreported in the interviews, which focused not on friendship in itself, but instead on reactions of friends to marital and repartnering decisions. The process and prevalence of losing friends should be furthered explored. Furthermore, these interviews focused on White and Latina women's perspective at a specific point in their divorce. It would be fruitful to expand this to consider the experiences of other race-ethnicities such as Black divorcees or how this might vary for Latinos across nativity status. Furthermore, it would be useful to also explore how these processes differ for divorced men and across age groups, as the intensity of friendship and parental ties, as well as the shape that moral attitudes take, may differ by gender and age. Examining this process over time could provide nuanced understanding of how family members and parents interact with divorced women from the period of separation to a more substantial time after the divorce is granted, as well as provide empirical evidence on who remarries.

In conclusion, when women are going through divorce and repartnering processes, friends tend to provide a supportive ear, while parents' support is shaped by the moral norms guiding this role. Latino parents were more likely to impress caution about repartnering, while White parents tended to encourage it. These findings emphasize how family relationships remains distinctive from the intimate ties of friendship, and how ethnic differences in parental responses may explain White-Latino differences in remarriage.

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<sup>i</sup> One exception was made for a divorcee who had recently turned 41 years old.

<sup>ii</sup> Interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately one hour. Participants received 40 dollars as compensation for their time.

<sup>iii</sup> Studies have found presence of children relates to remarriage (see Sweeney 2010) but does not explain Latino-White differences (Bumpass et al. 1990; McNamee and Raley 2014).

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